

UNITED NATIONS DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL AMINA J. MOHAMMED CALLS FOR GLOBAL ACTION ON WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AS NIGERIA FLAGS OFF UNESCO REF 12 MILLION MOBILISATION CAMPAIGN FOR YOUNG WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2025

March 4, 2025.



UNITED NATIONS DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL AMINA J. MOHAMMED

Introduction: A Defining Moment for Nigeria and the World On **4 March 2025**, the **Maryam Babangida National Centre for Women Development in Abuja** became the epicentre of a historic convergence of global leadership, national resolve, and grassroots mobilisation. The occasion was the **National Flag-Off of the UNESCO REF 12 million Mobilisation Campaign**, commemorating the **United Nations International Women's Day 2025**.

This campaign, formally recognised as a **National Empowerment Programme**, is not merely a project. It is a **movement of people, policy, and purpose**, designed to mobilise and equip **12 million Nigerian women and youth** with advanced skills in **Hydroponics and Agro-Kenaf Enterprise Development** under the **UNESCO REF Strategic Intervention Programme – Alpha (SIP-Alpha)**.

The day was charged with symbolism: the global observance of International Women's Day, the national urgency of food security, and the collective determination of leaders, institutions, and citizens to rewrite Nigeria's agricultural and empowerment story.

Global Leadership: Amina J. Mohammed's Call to Action

The **United Nations Deputy Secretary-General, Amina J. Mohammed**, stood as the voice of the international community. Her keynote was not just a speech; it was a **summons to humanity**.

She declared:

“Every woman empowered is a community strengthened, every girl educated is a nation advanced. Nigeria's 12 million Mobilisation Campaign is not just a national initiative; it is a global contribution to the 2030 Agenda.”

Her words framed the campaign as:

- A **national covenant** between Nigeria and its citizens.
- A **continental model** for Africa's Agenda 2063.
- A **global beacon** for the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

She reminded the world that **women's empowerment is not charity, but strategy** the most effective pathway to peace, prosperity, and planetary survival.

NATIONAL VOICES AND COMMITMENTS



Hajia Imaan Sulaiman-Ibrahim, Minister of Women Affairs

Hajia Imaan Sulaiman-Ibrahim,

The Honourable Minister reaffirmed the **Federal Government's unwavering commitment** to mainstreaming women's empowerment into every layer of national policy. She emphasised that the Young Women in Agriculture initiative is not an isolated project but a **pillar of the Renewed Hope Agenda** of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, designed to place women at the centre of Nigeria's economic transformation.

"When women are empowered, families are stronger, communities are safer, and nations are more prosperous. This campaign is a practical demonstration of our government's resolve to ensure that women are not left behind but are leading the charge in building a secure and prosperous Nigeria."

She concluded by pledging the Ministry's continued support in policy alignment, advocacy, and resource mobilisation to ensure that the mobilisation of 12 million women becomes a **lasting legacy for Nigeria and a model for Africa.**



Dr. Kayode Adeolu Egbetokun, Inspector-General of Police

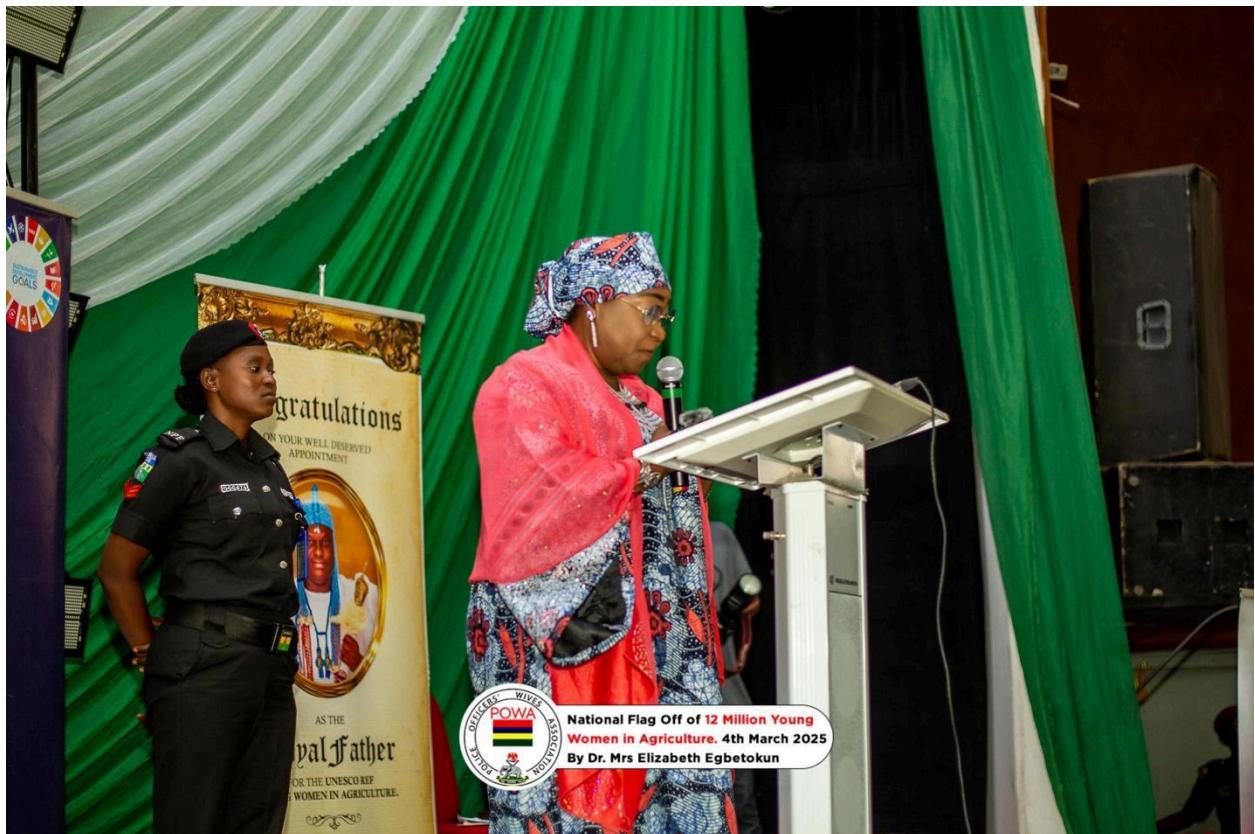
Dr. Kayode Adeolu Egbetokun, The Inspector-General of Police, **Dr. Kayode Adeolu Egbetokun**, lent his voice to the national mobilisation, commending the leadership of the **Police Officers' Wives Association (POWA)** for their foresight and commitment to women's empowerment. He noted that the initiative was not only timely but also strategic in addressing some of Nigeria's most pressing challenges.

"Food security is national security. When our women and youth are empowered to produce food, to create wealth, and to sustain their families, we are not only reducing hunger but also reducing crime, insecurity, and instability. A well-fed nation is a safer nation. This is why the Nigeria Police Force stands firmly behind this initiative, because it strengthens the very foundation of peace and security in our country."

Dr. Egbetokun further emphasised that the police institution, through POWA, is proud to be a partner in the UNESCO REF Young Women in Agriculture programme. He described the mobilisation of 12 million women as a **non-kinetic approach to national security**, one that

addresses the root causes of unrest by creating opportunities, reducing poverty, and restoring dignity to households.

He concluded by assuring that the Nigeria Police Force will continue to provide institutional support, advocacy, and protection for women and youth engaged in the programme, reaffirming that **security and development are inseparable twins** in the quest for a stronger Nigeria.



Hon. Dr. Vilita Asabe, Director-General, Maryam Babangida National Centre for Women Development.

Hon. Dr. Vilita Asabe, Dr. Vilita Asabe positioned the **Maryam Babangida National Centre for Women Development** as the **National Secretariat** of the Young Women in Agriculture programme, pledging that the Centre will serve as the hub for coordination and oversight. She stressed the importance of **accountability, monitoring, and evaluation**, making it clear that this initiative is not symbolic but results-driven.

“This is a performance mandate, not a ceremonial assignment. The Centre will ensure that every action taken under this programme translates into measurable impact for women, families, and communities across Nigeria.”

She concluded by affirming that the Centre will remain a **custodian of integrity and delivery**, ensuring that the mobilisation of 12 million women is both credible and sustainable.



Barr. Yejide Ogundipe, Senior Special Assistant to the President on Food Security (SSAP-FS)

Barr. Yejide Ogundipe, Delivering the Presidency's message, **Barr. Yejide Ogundipe** reaffirmed the Federal Government's **direct and strategic role** in brokering the support required to make the Young Women in Agriculture initiative a true national empowerment programme. She emphasised that the Presidency views this campaign not as a side project but as a **core pillar of the Renewed Hope Agenda**.

"Through my office, the Presidency will broker the financial support required to ensure that millions of Nigerians benefit from this National Empowerment Programme. This is not just an agricultural intervention; it is a national security and empowerment strategy. Food security under the Renewed Hope Agenda is not merely policy, it is a covenant with the Nigerian people."

She explained that the Presidency's involvement guarantees:

- **Financial sustainability:** ensuring that resources flow consistently to support training, infrastructure, and market access.

- **Policy alignment:** embedding the programme into national frameworks so it outlives political cycles.
- **National reach:** ensuring that all six geopolitical zones benefit equally, with no community left behind.

Barr. Ogundipe stressed that food security is the **“foundation of peace, stability, and prosperity”**, and that empowering women to lead in agriculture is the most effective way to secure households and communities. She described the initiative as a **“transformational covenant”** one that binds government and citizens together in a shared mission to end hunger, reduce poverty, and build resilience.

She concluded with a call to action:

“This programme is a promise kept. It is the Renewed Hope Agenda in action, practical, inclusive, and life-changing. We invite partners, donors, and every Nigerian to join us in ensuring that the empowerment of 12 million women becomes a legacy for generations to come.”



Prof. Veronica Obatolu Executive Director, The Institute of Agricultural Research & Training (IAR&T)-OAU

The IAR&T representative assured stakeholders of the institute's role in providing **technical backbone** for the programme. she highlighted three key contributions:

- Developing a **practical training curriculum** tailored to modern agriculture.
- Upholding **agronomic standards** with a focus on sustainability and climate-smart practices.
- Embedding **research-driven innovation** to keep beneficiaries globally competitive.

"This initiative bridges research and practice. Every YWA Champion will be equipped not just to farm, but to lead in a modern agricultural economy."



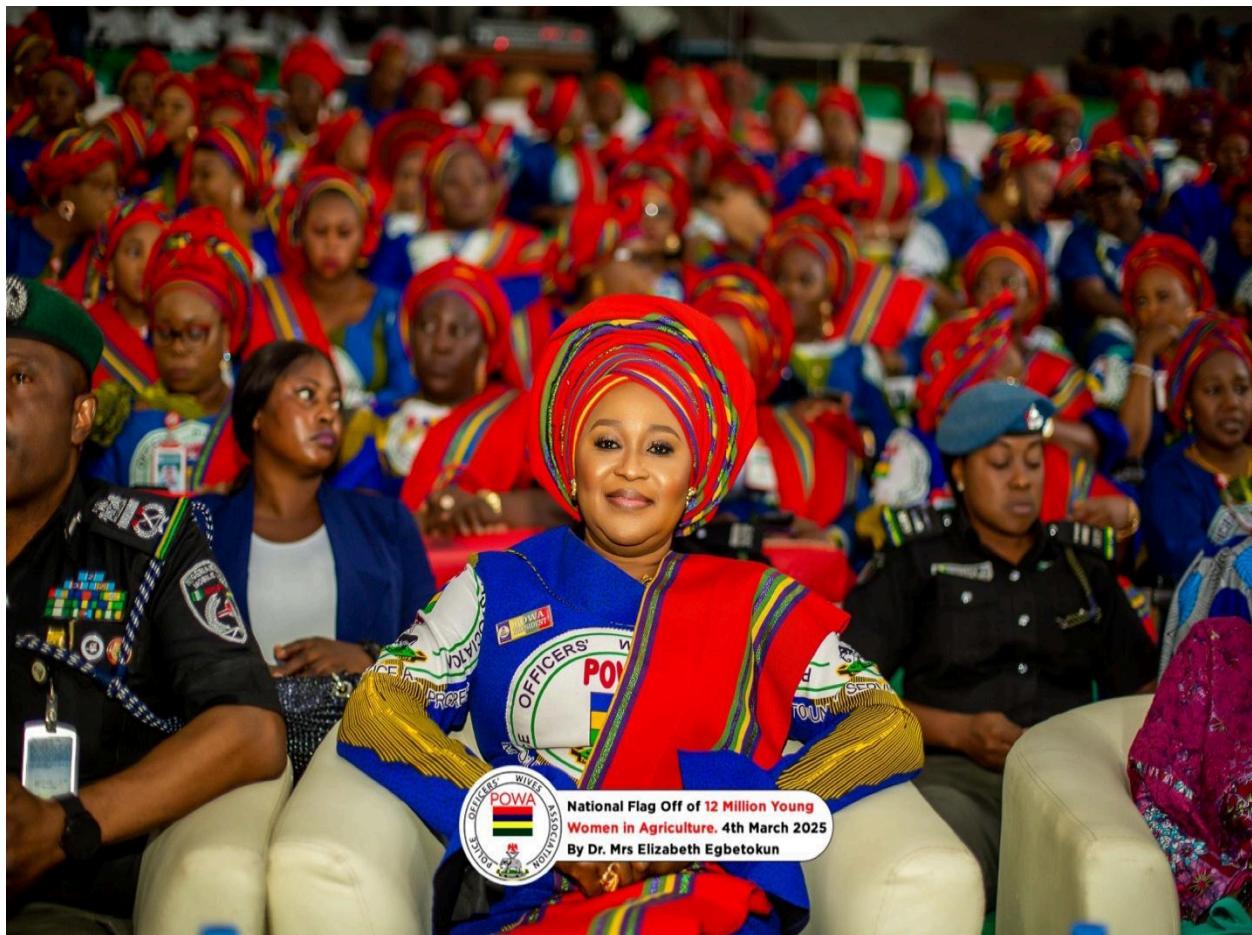
Dr. Lateef Olagju, Secretary-General, Nigerian National Commission for UNESCO

Representing UNESCO's institutional bridge between Nigeria and the global community,

Dr. Lateef Olaguju underscored the alignment of the 12 million Mobilisation Campaign with UNESCO's global mandate:

"Today, Nigeria is not only responding to a national emergency on food security, it is also contributing to a global movement for sustainable development. The Young Women in Agriculture initiative is a model of how UNESCO's values, education, empowerment, and equity, can be translated into practical programmes that change lives. As the Nigerian National Commission for UNESCO, we are committed to ensuring that this campaign remains anchored in international best practice, transparent governance, and measurable outcomes. We call on donor agencies, development partners, and the private sector to join hands with us in scaling this vision. Together, we can ensure that the empowerment of 12 million Nigerian women becomes a beacon for Africa and the world."

He concluded by affirming that the Commission will serve as a **custodian of accountability and international alignment**, ensuring that Nigeria's mobilisation campaign is recognised not only as a national milestone but also as a **UNESCO-endorsed global contribution** to the Sustainable Development Goals.



Dr. Mrs. Elizabeth Egbetokun, National President of POWA & National Advocate for YWA

Her address was both personal and institutional, weaving history with vision:

- **Legacy of POWA:** As leader of Nigeria's first and largest armed forces wives' organisation (est. 1964), she positioned POWA as a grassroots engine of mobilisation.
- **Strategic Partnerships:** She recalled alliances with **UNESCO REF** and global and national institutions (*The Lichfield Partners and Associates, The Lichfield Foundation, The London School of Management, The U-APP UK, Women's Space USA, Salvation Academy USA, University of the District of Columbia, Peace University USA, Hydro Cycle USA, OpenLabs USA, IAR&T, Relevant women society etc.*).
- **Programme Origins:** She traced YWA back to its launch in June 2023, themed "Enhancing the Economic Value of Nigerian Women Through the Agricultural Value Chain."
- **Policy Link:** She noted that YWA's launch contributed to the **2023 Presidential declaration of a state of emergency on food security.**
- **Scale and Duration:** 12 million women mobilised (2 million per geopolitical zone), over **2024–2027**, extendable to 2030.
- **Training:** Pioneer beneficiaries begin training on **10 March 2025** with a U.S. partner institution.
- **SDG Alignment:** Directly contributes to **SDG 1, 2, 3, and 8.**
- **Clarion Call:** She urged Nigerians at home and abroad to embrace the cause, pool resources, and create a supportive environment for women to thrive.

She closed with gratitude to **First Lady Senator Oluremi Tinubu, Minister of Women Affairs Hajia Imaan Sulaiman-Ibrahim, DG MBNCWD Dr. Vilita Asabe, POWA members nationwide, her husband IGP Kayode Adeolu Egbetokun, and the Ooni of Ife, Oba Adeyeye Enitan Ogunwusi, Ojaja II.**



Prince Ladigbolu - Oranmiyan, President of UNESCO REF & National Coordinator, YWA

His speech was a **strategic manifesto** for Nigeria's agricultural future:

- **Economic Context:** He traced Nigeria's over-dependence on oil, the 2016 recession, and the urgent need for diversification.
- **Food Security Crisis:** He highlighted small farm sizes, low productivity, post-harvest losses, and rising food imports as drivers of insecurity. Nearly **40% of Nigerians are food insecure** (NBS, 2022).
- **Demographic Pressure:** With Nigeria projected to be the **third largest country in the world by 2050**, food security is a national security imperative.

Project Objectives;

1. Diversify the economy away from oil.
2. Strengthen youth and women's capacities to enhance national security through non-kinetic approaches.
3. Facilitate agribusiness investment to help beneficiaries repay Federal Government education loans (NELFUND).
4. Break the cycle of poverty by guaranteeing **₦300,000–₦400,000 every 12 weeks** through value-chain agribusiness.

- **Duration and Scope:** Four years (2024–2027), extendable to 2030, covering all six geopolitical zones.
- **Participants:** POWA, NYSC members, civil servants, journalists, female armed forces, students, and non-HEI demographics.
- **Why Women?** He described women as multipliers, managers, and nation-builders, arguing that their economic empowerment is essential for sustainable development and political participation.
- **Visionary Call:** “This flag-off represents more than a formal start, it symbolizes the strength, resilience, and determination of our women. It is a commitment to build a sustainable and inclusive agricultural sector.”
- **Human Dimension:** He reminded the audience that agriculture is about **nourishing families, uplifting communities, and forging human connections.**



Prof. Hafsat Ganduje, wife to the Chairman, All Progressive Congress, Dr. Abdullahi Ganduje

Speaking as a strong advocate for women's empowerment, Prof. Ganduje underscored the grassroots importance of the campaign:

“The mobilisation of 12 million young women into agriculture is not just about food production, it is about dignity, opportunity, and security for families across Nigeria. When women are empowered with knowledge and resources, entire communities rise out of poverty. This campaign is a clarion call for every state, every local government, and every household to support women as the backbone of our nation’s food system.”

Some Beneficiaries' Testimonies shared testimonies of transformation, illustrating how the YWA National Empowerment Programme is already shifting lives from subsistence to sustainability.



Dr. Egan Okon - Effiong

As a PhD holder, my life's work has been dedicated to research and knowledge creation. But through the Young Women in Agriculture programme, I discovered that knowledge must also feed people. By learning hydroponics and kenaf enterprise, I am now able to translate theory into practice, providing both livelihood and nourishment to my community. This initiative has given me the tools to impact not just classrooms and journals, but households and futures, ensuring that women like me can stand tall as scholars, entrepreneurs, and nation-builders.



Dr. Elizabeth B.

Farming has always been my passion, but for many years it was a struggle to survive on what I produced. The Young Women in Agriculture initiative gave me access to modern methods and a guaranteed market, and promised to transform my passion into a sustainable livelihood. Today, more importantly, I have joined this programme so that I can build the capacity of other women in my community, sharing knowledge, creating opportunities, and proving that when women in agriculture rise, entire communities rise with them.”



Mrs. Chidi Nzota Deputy Director, Federal Ministry of Science and Technology, Nigeria.

Before joining the Young Women in Agriculture programme, I struggled to find a clear path for myself. Through the training and mentorship, I received, I gained practical skills in hydroponics and agribusiness that have opened new doors. This programme has shown me that with the right support, young women can be drivers of growth and innovation in Nigeria.

National Empowerment Outcomes

- **Direct Beneficiaries:** 12 million Nigerians trained and certified by 2030.
- **Women and Youth Empowerment:** Prioritising women and youth as the vanguard of food security.
- **Economic Dividends:** Billions of naira in new agricultural value chains, thousands of agribusinesses, and rural communities transformed.
- **Guaranteed Livelihoods:** Structured income streams for graduates, embedding resilience from day one.
- **Grassroots Reach:** SSC Cells in all 774 LGAs ensure no community is left behind.
- **Global Positioning:** Nigeria as a **continental leader in climate-smart agriculture**.
- **Intergenerational Legacy:** Today's trainees become tomorrow's mentors, ensuring sustainability beyond 2030.

Conclusion: A Covenant with the Future

The **flag-off of the UNESCO REF 12 million Mobilisation Campaign** on International Women's Day 2025 was more than a ceremony. It was a **national covenant and a global contribution** a solemn pledge that Nigeria will not only confront its food security challenges but also lead the world in demonstrating how women's empowerment can transform nations.

With the **United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed's global charge**, the **Federal Government's facilitation through the Office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on Food Security**, and the **partnership of Dr. Mrs. Elizabeth Egbetokun, National President of POWA and National Advocate for YWA; Prince Abdulsalami Ladigbolu - Oranmiyan, President of UNESCO REF and National Coordinator of YWA; Dr. Lateef Olaguju, Secretary-General of the Nigerian National Commission for UNESCO; Hon. Dr. Vilita Asabe, Director-General of the Maryam Babangida National Centre for Women Development; Hajia Imaan Sulaiman-Ibrahim, Minister of Women Affairs; Prof. representatives of the Institute of Agricultural Research & Training (IAR&T); Dr. Kayode Adeolu Egbetokun, Inspector-General of Police; and the testimonies of beneficiaries such as Dr. Okan Egan and Dr. Helen Elizabeth** this initiative has been anchored in both **policy and people, vision and action, global frameworks and grassroots realities.**

It is a covenant that binds together **government, international institutions, academia, civil society, security agencies, traditional leadership, and ordinary citizens** in one shared mission: to empower women, secure food systems, and build a Nigeria that is resilient, prosperous, and inclusive.

This is not just about agriculture. It is about **empowerment, dignity, and resilience**. It is about planting seeds today that will nourish a nation, uplift a continent, and inspire the world.

For media inquiries, please contact:

Ms. Bupwatda

Media & Outreach Officer

info@unesco-ref.org